

CHAPTER 46

Romantic Love

Romantic love has appeared at all times and places. Just about everyone inwardly longs for a thrilling love relationship involving oneness, a deep intimacy with another person, joy and optimism, spice and excitement, and that wonderful, euphoric, almost indescribable sensation known as “being in love.” Millions of words have been written to describe the state of being in love. Romantic love has the distinction of being regarded as the most passionate kind of love shared between two people. Some people say they are “on cloud nine.” Usually they mean that they feel energized, motivated and confident to conquer the world, because they know they are loved by their beloved. They believe that the strength of their love will overcome all problems. Everything seems to be in the realm of possibility!

The qualities of romantic love are intensity, passion, devotion, and purposeful aspiration. The emotions of romantic love give people a new outlook on life and a sense of well-being. Psychologists point out that true romantic love has an organizing and constructive effect on our personalities. It brings out the best in us, giving us the will to improve ourselves and to reach for greater maturity and responsibility.

Romantic love is meant to be the thrill factor in every marriage, which is why we

don't feel romantic love for our parents, children, relatives, or friends. When a man and woman love each other with *all their hearts*, they experience an intensely thrilling sensation. There is a state of profound physiological arousal. Some people ridicule romantic love, saying it's simply a myth. Nevertheless, if marriage partners do not love each other in this way, then something wonderful is missing, no matter how sincere their commitment to each other may be. Without this factor, marriage often becomes reduced to two people caught in the realistic grind of daily life.





Some people confuse genuine romantic love with falling in love or infatuation. But couples who have fallen in love or who are infatuated are totally content. Everything is perfect in their eyes, and thus infatuation is based on fantasy, whereas real romantic love has a foundation of strong but tender realism. Both partners work on trying to improve themselves and their relationship. Infatuation is occupied with external matters. Love is a response to the whole person. Infatuation is temporary and fades with time. Love keeps on growing and deepening with time. Infatuation demands and takes. Love delights and rejoices in giving.

Romantic love is a possibility for all who want to experience it in their marriage. Emotions cannot be commanded to appear, but they will come freely when the conditions are right. The desired feelings come as a result of right thinking and right actions. When reason is excluded from love's excitements, what results is not love but lust, superficial infatuation, or empty sentimentality. And who wants that in their marriage?

Romantic love is the sensation one experiences from the way one's partner looks, feels, and the emotional experiences that are shared. We can learn to provide

our mate with the kind of emotional climate that stimulates romantic interest and in which love flourishes. Within the depths of a committed relationship, thrills and strong emotions add a sweet savor to the daily life of marriage and family life.

For religious people, romantic love is as old as time itself. The religious perspective believes that God intended for our emotional potential to be fully developed in marriage and to find its fulfillment in oneness with our beloved. Sex is intended to give us pleasure and happiness, as we unite with our spouse in mind and body. Romantic love is believed to be God's gift and creation for marriage. It is a sign that God honors and blesses the love between husband and wife.

One of the greatest love songs ever written

Of the world's romantic literature, the Song of Solomon is among the greatest. This is a small book in the Bible devoted exclusively to love and marriage. Tradition ascribes this song to King Solomon, although today many biblical scholars believe that he was not the author. Although it was written almost 3,000 years ago (945 B.C.), it still serves as an inspirational and practical model of the growth of love for the average couple today. The principles concerning marriage transcend time and cultural differences and will always work when applied.

The Song of Solomon tells the story of a marriage between the king of Israel and a beautiful, unsophisticated country girl whom he met in the northern vineyards of

his kingdom. He wins her love, makes her his queen, and causes her love for him to deepen and intensify with the passing of time.

Shulamith, we are told, was a country girl, chastely brought up, but required by her stepbrothers to work in the vineyards so that her skin became deeply tanned, in contrast to the elegant, pampered, white-skinned ladies of the court. She felt inferior, unworthy to be Solomon's queen, but her husband skillfully and lovingly built up her self-image.

He did this first of all by praise. He sensitively praised her in the areas where she felt most insecure. He voiced appreciation of her physical appearance and her lovely character in specifics, not in vague generalities.

Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold, you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats, moving down the slopes of Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing...Your lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil...You are all fair, my love; there is no flaw in you.

— RSV, 4:1-3,7

He compared her with all other women so favorably that she could rest in the knowledge that she pleased him as no other woman could.

Like a lily among the thorns is my darling among the maidens.

— NIV, 2:1

He told her that she was completely and perfectly beautiful—without flaw. He did not say this just when they were courting or on their wedding day. He continued to praise her in the maturity of their marriage.

After making love on the wedding night, the young husband describes their love as a beautiful garden and as a wonderful feast he has celebrated.

Then another voice speaks—a mysterious voice. Who can it be? Wedding guests? On the wedding night? Hardly! The only one who could be with the couple at this most intimate time must be God. It is God who is approving and affirming the love shared this night. God's words are: "Eat, O friends, and drink: drink deeply, O Lovers." In other words, continue to enjoy the feast of love I have prepared for you!

The king not only praised Shulamith, he never criticized her, not even when she perhaps deserved it. His words to her were always encouraging, and they bore fruit in the kind of loving, responsive wife she became.

His love and approval were not just a private matter. The king showed publicly his adoration and respect for his wife. In the royal banqueting house, his banner over her was love. It became obvious to everyone that Shulamith was the most important person in his kingdom—to be honored, respected, and protected in every way. He treated her like a queen, and that is what she



became. He privately loved her in such a way that she could finally give herself completely to him, withholding nothing of her trust, her thoughts, her care and her love.

Of course, their marriage had challenges, as all marriages do. It is not unusual to have natural differences with one's mate. The test of spiritual and emotional maturity is how one works out these problems.

One day Shulamith had difficulty in adjusting to Solomon's demanding schedule as chief of state. One night, perhaps when he had promised to come home early, he did not arrive until very late. By this time she may have been offended. She was more concerned about her own comfort and schedule than about loving her husband. So she said she was not ready to see him, and she would not open her bedroom door to him.

Instead of making an issue of it, he quietly withdrew for a few hours to let her think it over. He left her alone, and gave her time to deal with her angry feelings. He left a sign of his love for her at the door—a gift: her favorite perfume.

Because he had not reacted as an irate husband, his wife quickly realized that she had acted selfishly. As soon as he withdrew, she began to long for him and went out to look for him. When the two were together again, the husband reassured his wife with tender love words repeated from their wedding night. "I love you just as much as ever." Within his love was the unspoken forgiveness for her.

Obviously Shulamith thought much about her husband. Her thoughts were occupied with him, even when they could not be together because of his duties.

All night long on my bed I looked for the one my heart loves; I looked for him but did not find him. I will get up now and go about the city, through its streets and squares; I will search for the one my heart loves. So I looked for him but did not find him.

— NIV, 3:2

She respected his manly character and often expressed her admiration of him to others.



My beloved is all radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand. His head is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, black as a raven. His eyes are like doves besides springs of water, bathed in milk fitly set. His cheeks are like beds of spices, yielding fragrance. His lips are lilies, distilling liquid myrrh. His arms are rounded gold, set with jewels. His body is ivory work, encrusted with sapphires. His legs are alabaster columns, set upon bases of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars. His speech is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend.

— RSV, 5:10-16

When he complimented her, she responded with her own expressions of praise and left him in no doubt as to her feelings for him.

How handsome you are, my lover! Oh, how charming!...Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade and his fruit is so sweet to my taste.

— NIV, 1:16, 2:3

Brought up as a chaste young woman, she now was free to delight in her husband's caresses and she wholeheartedly responded to his love. She was thrilled by his touch at all times, eager for his embraces and she let him know it. She enjoyed his company and planned delightful times for the two of them.

He tells her, "Show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely." This speaks of a man who loved to look into his wife's eyes, who loved to talk with her and to hear what she had to say to him. As a result of this openness and communication, their relationship could grow and mature until it became many-faceted, expressing all aspects of love. He was her brother, lover, teacher, friend, companion, husband, and she was equally everything to him. Their conversation, their lovemaking, their enjoyment in being together became even deeper and richer in quality.

To see how she blossomed in the security of his love, we can compare three statements she made. When she first came to love him, she said, "My beloved is mine and I am his." Her possession of him was foremost in her mind. But later in their relationship she said, "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine." Note that she reversed the order. Now his possession of her was more important. Finally, in the fullness of their love, she said, "I am my beloved's and his desire is toward me." By this time she was so focused on him that she had forgotten about possessing him. She had lost herself in the greatness of his love, and she gloried only in his desire for her.

At the end of the Song, the husband's last words were: "Let me hear your voice." These were the words he had first whispered to her when they were courting. Then he had compared her to a gentle dove hidden from him whose voice he wanted to hear so that he could come to know the inmost person of her heart. Now he still longed with the same intensity to grow in the knowledge of his fascinating wife. And his wife repeated her longing to be with him. Their physical love life had become better and better, nourishing their entire relationship. The romance of their marriage had only increased with the years!

Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like a blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away.

— NIV, 8:6-7

The fires of true love can never be quenched because the source of its flame is God himself. Even were a river of rushing water to pass over it, the flame would yet shine forth. Of all the gifts in the world, this priceless love is the most precious and possessed only by those to whom it is freely given. For no man could purchase it with money, even the richest man in the world.

Individual Exercises



History and literature have produced many legendary lovers. Briefly investigate the lives and loves of any famous couple. What impediments did their love encounter? How did they overcome those obstacles? Prepare a two- or three-minute presentation to give to the class. Be sure to distinguish between fiction and fact. Some possibilities include:

- Antony and Cleopatra
- Romeo and Juliet
- Dante and Beatrice

For Your Journal



My ideal relationship

Make three columns. In the first, write *Spouse*; in the second, write *Parents*; and in the third, write *Friend*. In the first column list all the qualities that you would like to experience in an ideal relationship with your spouse. Then in the second column list all the qualities that you would like to experience in an ideal relationship with your parents. Finally, list all the qualities that you would like to experience in an ideal friendship with a person of the same sex.

From your list, what do you believe makes marriage a special and unique relationship? What is the *special* something that you want to give to your spouse and *only* to your spouse?

To***

by Alexander Pushkin

The Russian poet Alexander Pushkin was well-known for his verses expounding romantic love. Here is one of them:

O wondrous moment! There stood before me
A radiant, fleeting dream you stood,
A vision fancy fashioned for me,
A glimpse of perfect womanhood.

Through all life's sadness, all its flaunted
But hopeless flurry and unrest
Your lovely face my spirit haunted,
Your tender voice my ear caressed.

Swift tempests, o'er me, wrathful, breaking,
Dispelled the dulcet dreams of yore.
Your image blurred, my heart forsaking,
Your voice caressed my ear no more.

In cold and gloomy isolation
The years sped by, the lonely years,
Bereft of God, of inspiration,
Bereft of life and love and tears.

And then—o bliss!—time's flight defeating,
You came again and 'fore me stood,
A vision radiant and fleeting,
A dream of perfect womanhood.

My heart is filled with sweet elation,
Anew it craves, anew reveres,
And is awake to inspiration,
Awake to life and love and tears.



To read

"I Love You", by Elmo Robinson, in *The Art of Loving Well*